

Movie Makers

March,-April, 2000

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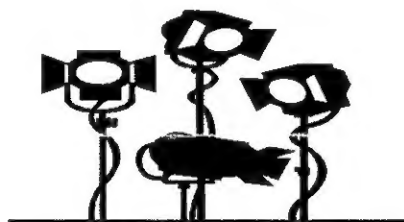
The American Motion Picture Society

It's as Easy as Idea, Equipment, and Audience

R Matt Jenkins
Recently, a student walked into my class and said there were no camera batteries so this person could not shoot the assigned project and what was I going to do about it? Apparently other students had taken more batteries than were necessary to shoot their own projects. Since I was in the middle of a class there was very little I could do to help this student at that moment except to encourage camera/battery usage at a different time. However, this met with a negative response.

Why begin with this story? Even though AMPS members may consider themselves "amateurs" or low/no budget producers, planning is essential to any successful production. When translating an idea into a finished product, we can divide our efforts into three categories: idea, equipment, and audience for planning purposes.
IDEA

it's really senseless to shoot a production without a solid and developed idea. Carry a notebook with you so you can easily



write down ideas as they come to you. An idea that isn't developed is really rather worthless. Idea development can be as easy as writing a simple run down or order of the shots (ideal for music videos.) Or as complex as a split page format script complete with camera angles and music cues. The more detail you can put on paper before you shoot, the better your production will be.

EQUIPMENT

Only after your "script" is completed can you decide equipment needs. I envision the term

"equipment" to include: people, physical equipment, finances, locations, time needed for production, and any component which will contribute to translating the idea into a finished program.

From the script you will be able to determine the number of on-camera people as well as how many behind the scenes personnel you need.

Only after the script is done will you be able to see if you need any special equipment in order to create the images. Hopefully you won't put anything in the script that you can't create with your existing equipment. So knowledge of your equipment limitations is a must. Finances? My video is going to have costs? Sure, maybe not visible costs but there are costs for videotape or film stock. Perhaps you have to rent a piece of equipment such as boom mic or steady-cam or you have to pay to have
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From the Editor

Movie Makers

Dedicated to the interests of the Serious Motion Picture Maker.

**Vol. 10 March-April 2000
No. 2**

MOVIE MAKERS is published bi-monthly on the 25th day of even-numbered months by the AMERICAN MOTION PICTURE SOCIETY and features news and articles of interest to the serious motion picture maker, video or film.

Membership price per year is \$7.00, Canada \$9.00, foreign addresses \$10.00, all payable in U.S. funds or equivalent. Articles may be copied when the source is given. Back copies are available at .80 cents post paid.

**George W. Cushman
Founder,
1909- 1996**

Matt Jenkins, Editor

The AMERICAN MOTION PICTURE SOCIETY is not connected with any other organization, society, club or association. The Society does not offer dual, club, nor group memberships.

Address correspondence to the Society, 30 Kanan Rd. Oak Park, CA 91377-1105. E-mail: RGARRETSON1@JUNO.COM.

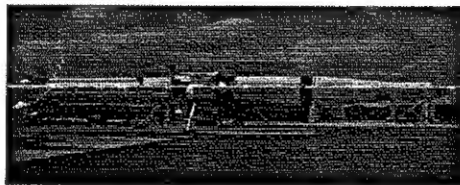
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I am in the middle of another documentary. So far pre-production has taken three months. I am working a piece that has great personal meaning. My father was part of a team that developed a machine to generate electricity for the astronauts while they were on the moon. So it has been fun to talk to him about it and to read his old reports. My biggest fear is how will I react when the rejections from festivals come. I am being realistic. Not every festival accepts every production. My production may place in some festivals and not in others.



It has been easy to accept "ownership" of this production. What I mean by ownership is, it is a work of mine, it will have my name on it, and it must represent my best possible effort. I explain this idea of ownership to my students, who sometimes have difficulty with it. They can also apply this idea to writing papers or working at a job. Always do the best you can, as it is a reflection of you and your abilities. Of course it doesn't mean your efforts have to be painful in order to do a good job. I guess that is one of the reasons that I do productions I enjoy it.

In this documentary I am faced with the problem of keeping it interesting to the average viewer. It's already interesting to my fa-

ther and me. But will the typical viewer enjoy it? I will lose my audience if I provide lots of technical information and use technical language. I've decided to show the human side of this endeavor, what the people involved were thinking and doing. The participants will relay their feelings in their own words. Sometimes it's tough to get people to appear on camera. I had to do a little selling of my abilities and myself and I think the trust is there now.

Also I want to inject a little humor into the production. Humor can be dangerous if improperly used or if your audience doesn't get it. I heard a program pitch last week where the person giving the talk used jokes that I considered inappropriate for a this setting. A program pitch is when a person explains the idea behind the show and tries to raise money to produce it. Alienating your audience in this way can only hurt. So perhaps instead of humor, let's say I will keep it light hearted.

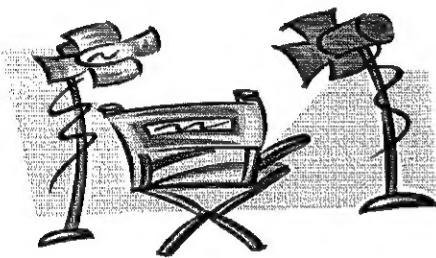
And of course I won't get too technical. However, since I have schematics of the machine, I will use them in the graphic design for the documentary. I plan to use them as backgrounds behind words and other pictures. This will help provide a technical feel.

Unfortunately, no film footage exists of the device in action, though I have lots of photographs. So I must create the feeling of motion with the stills to avoid having the production end up being just a slide show. And
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(From the Editor Continued from Page 2)

I will mix the stills with lots of footage from NASA. You can use NASA footage in your productions as long as no one is recognizable.

Starting with this issue, there is the new "Ask the Doc" section. In this forum I will do my best to answer your questions regarding film/video production. I will only answer questions in the column.



You may e-mail your questions to me at mattj@cameron.edu or send them via regular mail to "Ask the Doc" care of AMPS, 30 Kanan Rd, Oak Park, California 91377-1105.

I hope this becomes a regular feature of the newsletter.

Also starting with this issue, is a review of film/video festivals column. I am also writing the column and from time to time will review various festivals from an AMPS member's perspective. This month the Slamdance Festival is discussed.

As always you may send your articles for submission consideration and e-mail your comments to either Roger Garretson or me.

Matt Jenkins

Slamdance, a Review

Matt Jenkins

Sure, I've been rejected from Slamdance, at least three times. Will that affect my review? Hmm...

According to their web page, the Slamdance festival began in 1995 when first time directors screened their films concurrent to the Sundance Festival. The site, www.slamdance.com, does contain a downloadable entry form and much information regarding the festival. The big question is, is Slamdance for the average film/video maker? Well, what is average? I don't know personally. Probably, Slamdance isn't worth entering if your entry is a low/no budget production.

The Slamdance people even say themselves that with the amount of entries they receive, its statistically easier to get a production accepted into Sundance than into Slamdance.

With early entry fees (1999-2000) being \$25.00 for entries under 40 minutes and \$40.00 for entries over 40 minutes and late fees of \$35 for entries under 40 minutes and \$55.00 for entries over 40 minutes, its probably better to spend your money else where.

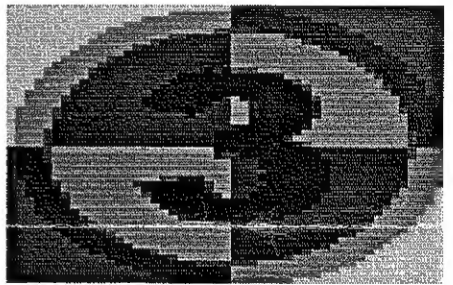
They do send you a witty rejection letter but its done mass mailing style and no comments or reasons why your piece was rejected are included. Slamdance is most likely for

those who've mortgaged their lives to produce the great "epic." For the rest of us, it's only a few months before the AMPS festival comes around again.

Visit AMPS online at:

www.cameron.edu/~mattj/page8.html

Please consider this to be a sample page. Your comments and suggestions are welcome. Yes it is an odd address but again this is a sample page.



AMPS FESTIVAL ENTRY FORMS

That's right. It's time to get editing and finish up those videos you have been working on! The American Motion Picture Society International Film and Video Festival is right around the corner. Entry form will be mailed to all AMPS members in the July-August issue of "Movie Makers." However, if you can't wait that long to enter your epic, you may write for an entry form to AMPS, 30 Kanan Road, Oak Park, California 91377-1105. So get your videos ready and remember, you can't win if you don't enter!

Digital 8 – Is It any Good?

TECHNICAL

By Jim Beach

Apparently it is very good from what I have read and heard. Here are some excerpts from an article by Vernon Kato in DV magazine for December '99 relating to Sony's DV#210 digital 8 Handycam Camcorder list price \$1399. Excerpts from other sources are also shown in italics:

1. Digital images look as good as DV images made be a similar low-end camcorder. All current Digital 8 camcorders are aimed at budget-minded consumers. You can't currently get them with three CCDs, interchangeable lenses, or other features that make certain high end DV camcorders so appealing. But what you do get is a good simple camcorder at a good price. Videomaker laboratory tests rate it at 380 lines of horizontal resolution in both the camera and playback modes while MiniDV camcorders rate 400 lines and Hi8 about 300 lines.

2. It is bulkier and heavier than its cousins in the DV line mainly due to the larger cassettes. It is seven ounces heavier than the Sony DCR-TRV9 .

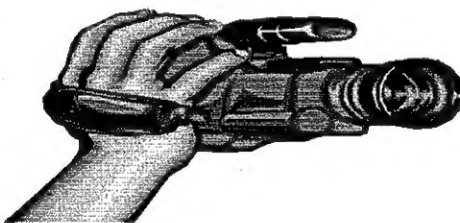
3. It's controls, zoom and 20x/360x lens, stabilization and numerous menu controlled features were all good. It has an easy to use manual focus ring but

it does not have manual white balance.

4. Audio was rated middle of the road due to no manual audio control, wind noise and AGC (automatic gain control). A very important advantage over Hi8 or 8mm camcorders is the ability to dub audio onto a recorded tape .

5. You can use Digital8 camcorders to convert analog Hi8 tapes to DV for editing on a 394-(firewire)-based editing system.

6. Sony stocked this camera with a lot of nice features, the night shot feature permits recording in the dark with three different shutter speeds. Picture effects include black and white, sepia, solarize and mosaic. Other standard Sony touches are a large four-inch LCD screen, a hot shoe for strobes or other accessories and the Sony



lithium battery system. The lithium battery is a huge advantage over the older battery systems.

Despite its awkward size and weight limited manual controls and middle of the road audio the DCR-TRV510 was easy to use and hassle free. For those people who have accumulated a large collection of Hi8 tapes and want a low cost upgrade to digital format, the TRV510 will suit them perfectly. Sony makes three other models, each with fewer features. This is

the only one with a color viewfinder, a very important feature.

Facts versus Hype about the DV Format.

With the advent of digital video in the DV format, MiniDV (consumer), DVCPRO or DVCam the amateur is now able to afford near broadcast quality video movie producing equipment. That includes camcorders and editing equipment.

Of course we don't have access to the myriad of other expensive assets such as, multi-thousand dollar lenses, studio lighting and audio recording gear, crews of set designers, dozens of helpers of all kinds and of course high paid talent. But, who needs all of that, we now have, within our means, the ability to produce near broadcast quality videos.

There are many myths about the DV format and an article in DV magazine points out where the truth lies. It says that in some cases there is a kernel of truth in the myth and in others just hot air. Here are some excerpts from the article:

Myth #1: "Our DV is better than their DV"

There are differences between Mini DV (most consumer camcorders), Panasonic's DVCPRO and Sony's DVCAM, but not in picture quality. The differences are too technical to be of interest here and relate mostly to TV broadcast studio use where wear and tear from linear editing is a factor.

Myth #2: "Software codecs recompress the video; hardware
(Continued on Page 5)

Digital 8 Continued from Page 4)

codecs don't".

DV editing systems come in two flavors - hardware codec or software codec. The hardware codec is more expensive as it uses the digital deck to encode and decode the signal in real time. The software codec based cards is less expensive and sort of borrows the hardware codec from your DV deck or camcorder to provide real time playback on an NTSC monitor.

In fact this myth is completely without foundation. The internal DV data in the file remains untouched although each system does something different to the DV code.

Myth #3: " All DV codecs are the same."

This isn't true either. Yes, they all must be programmed to the same bluebook standards, but these standards allow considerable flexibility in the encode/decode process. Some codecs are faster but less accurate; others are optimized for playback but do worse when compressing sharp edges. Some codecs are optimized for computer-generated graphics resulting in a visible darkening of special effects, titles or transitions.

Myth #4: "DV isn't as good as Beta SP."

It is pretty much a judgement call between Beta SP and DV, depending on the situation. The fact of the matter is that DV actually has better luminance resolution than Beta SP. DV has 550

lines of horizontal resolution, while Beta SP has about 400. DV and Beta SP have almost exactly the same color (chrominance) resolution.

Ask the Doc.

Dear Doc:

I don't like to carry a tripod around with me when I shoot. What can I do to get steadier hand held shots with my camcorder?

Signed
Shaky picture, California

Dear Shaky:

I would encourage you to use a tripod. Shooting hand held takes lots of patience and practice. However, I used to shoot weddings professionally. Often, at the reception, there wasn't room or time for me to waltz around with a tripod and get the necessary shots. So I had to shoot hand held. Here are some suggestions.

Consider camera weight. In order for me to shoot quality hand held images, I need to have a slightly heavy camera. Palmcor- ders just don't have enough weight for me to keep them steady. For the receptions I chose a Panasonic PV-700, a full sized VHS camcorder. The price was right and it was just the right weight, not too heavy or light. And the extra batteries were small enough to fit in a suit jacket pocket. This camera isn't made anymore but the updated version with color viewfinder can still be bought.

You need to stand with your weight evenly distributed on

both feet with legs slightly apart. Or lean against a wall for stability.

If you plan to pan while shooting hand held, position yourself so your body is twisted to begin the pan and you pan around until your body is straight at the end of the pan.

Keep the length of your shots short. Often we get tired of holding a shot for a length of time. Frame your shot, shoot it and then move on to the next shot.

Don't shoot objects with the lens zoomed all the way into the telephoto position. When the camera is zoomed all the way in, the slightest movement looks catastrophic. Move closer to your subject and shoot with the zoom in a wider position. Then camera movement isn't as noticeable.

Finally, practice. Go out and practice shooting hand held in your neighborhood. Practice a lot. Then the next time you are shooting a serious piece, you should be ready.

Dr. Matt Jenkins will answer questions from AMPS members regarding video/film production. If he doesn't know the answer, he'll let you know. E-mail your questions to mattj@cameron.edu with "Ask the Doc" in the subject line or send them via regular mail to

"Ask the Doc" Care of AMPS, 30 Kanan Road, Oak Park, California 91377-1105

Elements You Control

No 7 - July, 1992

George Cushman

Last issue we discussed the factors during the judging session of a competition over which you have no control. Now let's look at the elements over which you do have control.

A judge does not know how much effort you may have expended on your production, so effort counts for nothing. A judge sees only what you put on the screen and you control that 100%.

We shall assume you have the story, or theme of your picture, that is the editorial content, exactly the way you want it. Now let's look at those other details of a motion picture that rear their heads upon projection.

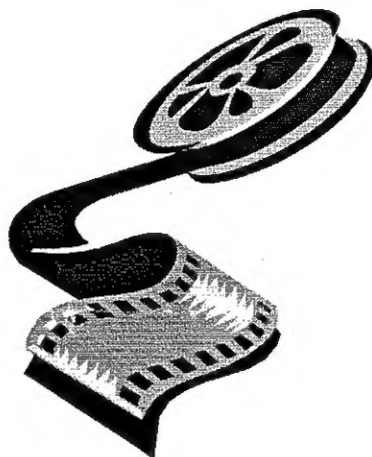
Whether he realizes it or not, a good judge admires professionalism. A motion picture that looks and projects as though it were in a big theater will make a positive impression any judge worth his salt.

The beginning is extremely important for it tends to indicate the type and style of the presentation to follow. How does your picture start? With a white leader? No projectionist ever shows a white screen. You can prevent this by placing an opaque leader and trailer on

film, and a black leader and trailer on video tape.

How does the sound track start? If you music at the beginning, does it forcefully set the mood for what is to follow? Does it prompt the judge to take notice and become immediately interested?

Is the main title easy to read, placed well in the frame, steady and level? Does it indicate the type of picture that is coming?



If your production is film, is it free of dust and dirt? No perforation holes left in by the processor? (Strange how often they are seen.) No splices that cause a jump or don't project cleanly?

If video, is it free of drop outs and single, unintended frames left in from careless editing?

Is there a fade or wipe that is not followed by a matching effect? An no jump cuts unless they are intentional and the reason is clear?

A multitude of bloopers often appear on the sound track. Are

the segues smooth and inaudible, unless so intended?

Is the background music consistent in volume? The same goes for the dialog. Do either change so radically that the projectionist must keep adjusting the volume level? And equally important, does the music at the end "tail out, or does it simply stop measure as the end title comes on the screen? A professional always brings his music to an end with his picture. A dramatic picture usually needs "dramatic" music for its ending.

And the narration: is it clear and easy to understand? Does the narrator use an irritating accent? Is the voice smooth and relaxed, or so nervous it is noticeable? Is the narrator obviously reading printed words? He must rehearse until no audience thinks he is using a script.

A cut can be made in a picture any time, but a cut in the middle of a sentence, and especially in the middle of a word, is a strict no-no unless there is a specific reason for it and it is totally acceptable to the audience.

Is the picture too long for what it has to say? Is it redundant? Will it hold the judge's attention throughout its length?

All of these factors in making a motion picture are details over which you as the maker have total control. On these items, and many more like them, your picture is judged. You must give a professional look and feel from the opening frame to the last. A good judge can, and will, see and hear your weaknesses.

(Continued from Page 1)

some footage transferred from a different format to one you can edit. Traveling to locations costs money and people that work with you must be fed! Here again the script will enable you to budget your production.

Most likely your production will be shot on location. You need to be able to schedule access to these locations and be sure you have permission to shoot there!

How much time will I need for editing? Production scheduling is hard to estimate but an essential part of production. First, time equals money. Even if you shoot as a hobby, shooting and editing takes time away from work or school or family or other obligations. People involved in your life will want to know "How long is it going to take?" Become good at estimating.

Those around you will less likely get angry if you give an accurate estimate of how much time is needed. Scheduling locations, necessary people for production, equipment rentals or loans all can become a headache. Remain calm about it and from the start plan extra time into your shooting and editing so that when it rains on the days you want to shoot out doors, you have the time to reshoot.

AUDIENCE

Listed last but perhaps the most important aspect of production. We create programs to be appreciated by others. When should you consider your audience? In the pre-production, production and post production stage.

Pre-production

Using big multi syllable words will lose your audience every time. The ideas in your scripts can be complex but keep the wording simple. The ideas in your script could

be fantastic such as aliens landing but the audience must believe that this could possibly happen.

Production

Just because it is low budget doesn't mean it has to look low budget. Know your equipment and limitations and shoot accordingly. A good story line can carry a production but sloppy camera work or poor audio or lighting will certainly hurt it.

Post Production

Watch the jump cuts in the video and pops that can occur in audio editing. Map out your editing session prior to beginning editing. A sure sign that a producer doesn't have a clue is when it is said "Let's decide when we edit." Make major decisions before you edit and then consider changes if your initial decisions don't work.

Upcoming Festivals

| Close Date | Festival Name & Address for forms | Open to: | Subject | Formats | Time Limit | Entry Fee | Award | Show Dates |
|---|--|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|--|---|---|
| 3/16 | 5th Mississippi Valley Int'l Video Festival % Joan Winslow, 822 Limoge Dr., Manchester, MO 63021-6605 | A | G | M-NTSC | 20 MIN | \$9 | Medals V | 4-5-00 St Louis, MO |
| 4/15 | Cotswold Int'l Film&Video Festival C.I.F.V.F., 37, Canberra, Stonehouse Gloucestershire, GL10 2PR England e-mail leepres@anglovideogxy.demon.co.uk | ABG | G | MN on PAL or VHS on NTSC | 20 MIN | Y | T UV | Stroud, Gloucester- shire, England |
| 8/31 | American Int'l Film & Video Festival % AMPS, 30 Kanan Rd., Oak Park, CA 91377-1105 USA | ABC | G | HJMNO PZ | 30 MIN | \$10 1st tape \$8 for 2nd tape | TUVW | To be announced |
| N/A Not Announced or Not Available Please include a self addressed stamped envelope with your entry request | | | | | | | | |
| A Non Commercial B College Student C Hi Sch Gr Sch | D Independant E Commercial F Restricted | G Open H S8 J 16mm | K Other L 3/4" M VHS | N SVHS O 8mm P Hi8 Z MiniDV | Q Invitatat'l R Regional S Exceptions | T Cash U Trophies V Certificate | W Other Award X Approximate Y It Varies | |

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Order your own copy of the winners reel from last year's AMPS Festival.

Besides enjoying the excellent productions, it will make a great program for a video club.

Its only \$8 including shipping. Make your check or money order out to AMPS and send it to:

Winner's Reel
Care of AMPS, 30 Kanan
Road, Oak Park, Califor-
nia 91377-1105.

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I Would like to Join the Society:

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| Dues USA: (includes - Movie Maker) | \$ 7.00 |
| Dues Canada: (includes. - Movie Maker) | \$ 9.00 |
| Dues-Foreign: (includes - Movie Maker) | \$10.00 |
| Enclosed _____ | |

NAME: _____

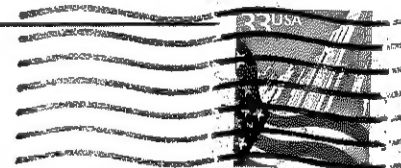
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